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RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO 3193
RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH 7698
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 1779
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DEPARTMENT FOR PA, NEA/ARN, INR/IC/CD, INR/R/MR:STHIBEAULT AND
JMCCARTER, VOA NEWS CA, NEA/PPD:CBOURGEOIS, AZAIBACK, AND
AFERNANDEZ, IIP/G/NEA-SA MDAVIDSON
WHITE HOUSE FOR NSC
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SUBJECT: Presidential Referendum, Syria/UK, Syrian Policy, Iraq
(5/30)

1. Summary: Syrian papers featured a statement made by Speaker of the People's Assembly on May 29 officially announcing Bashar Al-Asad as the President of the Syrian Arab Republic for a new 7-year term following the final results of popular referendum in which the President won a reported 97.62 percent of the votes. On May 30 President Asad received phone calls from King Abdullah II of Jordan, King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa of Bahrain and Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, Emir of Qatar, congratulating him on the confidence of the Syrian people expressed in the referendum and his election as President of Syria for a second constitutional term.

Papers also reported Vice-President Shara's May 29 meeting with a group from the British House of Commons, headed by Jeremy Hunt, which included representatives from both the Labor and Conservative parties. Talks dealt with the latest developments in the regional and international arenas. VP Shara answered the group's questions on regional issues and he asserted that foreign intervention, hegemonic policies, the absence of the international resolutions, and the enforcement of resolutions supporting the Israeli occupation have led to the tension and instability in the region. "The policy of dictates has been foiled," VP Shara said, stressing that dialogue is the only way to reach acceptable solutions to the problems of the Middle East. VP Shara confirmed that Israel's full withdrawal from the occupied Golan and occupied Arab territories is necessary to achieve security and stability in the region. For their parts, members of the British delegation stressed Syria's important and pivotal role regarding settlement of the crises in the region and the necessity for continuing dialogue and contacts with Syria.

Papers also reported President Asad's meeting on May 29 with Hilarion Capucci, former Metropolitan of Jerusalem. Talks during the meeting dealt with the current situation in the occupied Palestinian territories and the oppression and unjust practices against the Palestinian people by the Israeli occupation authorities.

End of summary.

2. Selected Headlines:

"President Asad wins a new term in office with an unprecedented unanimity" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 5/30)

"President Asad receives congratulatory phone calls from the Kings of Jordan and Bahrain and the Emir of Qatar" (Government-owned Tishreen, 5/30)

"The number of Syrians who voted 'Yes' on the nomination of President Asad reached 11,199,445 citizens" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 5/30)

"President Asad discusses Israeli occupation practices against the Palestinian people" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 5/30)

"VP Shara receives a British parliamentary delegation: Policy of dictates has been foiled" (Independent al-Watan, 5/30)

13. Editorial Block Quotes:

"Syrians Loudly Say 'Yes' to President Asad,
the Man of Principles"

Muna Niyazi, a commentator in government-owned Al-Ba'th, wrote (5/30): "Syrians, after saying yes to President Asad, view his second term in office with hope and optimism, knowing that his abilities, courage, and wisdom in the past seven years resulted in major achievements, initiatives, and steps toward development and progress...."

"Syria lies in wait to stop all attempts aimed at making it capitulate or admit defeat.... The attempts to subjugate Arabs will not succeed because strong Syria, with its courageous leadership, stands in the face of every attempt to bring the region to its knees...."

"Chemical Equation for the Future"

Khalid al-Ashhab, an editorialist in government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (5/30): "The responsibility for developing the country and safeguarding its independence and sovereignty is a joint responsibility shouldered by the leader and the people...."

"It will not be enough for us to unanimously agree on the leadership of the president and then relax and expect miracles and the impossible from him. Nor will it be enough to reduce the trust to the rights and ignore the duties. The unanimity is the first step, but many more steps must follow. Just as the past seven years were full of work and successes despite the flaws and stumbles, the next seven years should be like the previous ones, with initiative, diversity, and the entrenchment of confidence added to them...."

"Pan-Arab Significance for Syrian 'Yes'"

Information Minister Dr. Muhsen Bilal, commented in government-owned Tishreen, (5/30): "When Syrians say 'yes' to President Asad, they express support for a policy and position that has always said 'no' to colonialist plans for the Arab nation."

"Syrians realize the national and pan-Arab responsibilities of their country, and their 'yes' to the President essentially reflects national and pan-Arab commitment to the absolute sovereignty of all Arabs, a sovereignty that is organically linked, from Palestine's sovereignty and peace to Iraq's sovereignty, unity, and genuine national affiliation...."

"Challenges for Syrian Foreign Policy"

Ibrahim Darraji, a commentator in independent Al-Watan, wrote (5/30): "Syria, in its confrontation of pressures, challenges, and accusations in the past seven years, has adopted a cautious policy based on the principle of absorbing the crises without rushing to random policies or uncontrolled reactions. It has mobilized its sources of power, scattered on more than one front and in more than one direction, and skillfully wove them together in a way that turned Syria into a key player impossible to ignore in the region...."

"This led to the failure of Washington's efforts to isolate Syria. The next years will obviously bring additional challenges that Syria must deal with in the right way, starting from the challenge it is facing on the Lebanese front. The United States and Israel are fabricating problems and creating crises for Syria in Lebanon to exhaust Syria in political, security, and military matters and always place it on the defense so that it cannot focus on regaining its rights in the Golan and defending other Arab rights in Palestine and Iraq...."

"Foreign challenges, however, must not distract the Syrian decision-maker from the domestic situation and the need to improve people's lives and preserve their security, dignity, rights, and interests...."

"Just US Interests!"

Ghazi al-Dada, a commentator in government-owned Tishreen, wrote (5/30): "When Americans talk about measures to protect their troops in Iraq without mentioning the Iraqi people, they indirectly admit that their mission in Iraq is to serve pure American economic and political ambitions, not to bring democracy to Iraq, as they claim. All what the US Administration cares about is serving US interests, which necessarily converge with the Israeli interests."

"The main US objective is to fragment Iraq and the whole region so that Israel will emerge as the strongest, undisputed power."

"Iraqis must foil these American plans through adherence to national unity and the achievement of a genuine national reconciliation...."

Corbin